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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of the relationship between students' cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic background and their unequal access to educational opportunities are examined. The theme is that in order to understand the barriers to equality faced by low-income cultural and linguistic minority youth, ways in which social class and ethnicity interact with language and culture must be understood. Areas covered include cultural capital, classroom discourse, and school sorting practices. It is shown that: (1) the cultural capital of different status groups is related differently to the culture of the school and that language and socialization practices of middle-class and upper-class families are reinforced by classroom culture, although there is no match for low-income and linguistic minority families; (2) classroom discourse is a crucial component of the school culture, but an unfamiliar one to students from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds; (3) sorting practices such as ability grouping and tracking erect barriers to equal educational opportunity; and (4) the culture of the school must be taken into account when considering social change. Contains 56 references. (LB)

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SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS SUPPORTING THE STUDY OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Sociological Foundations Supporting the Study of Cultural Diversity

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SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Sociological Foundations Supporting the Study of Cultural Diversity

Abstract

In order to understand the barriers to educational equality faced by low-income cultural and linguistic minority youth, we need to understand the ways in which social class and ethnicity interact with language and culture. This paper examines various aspects of the relationship between students' cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic background and their unequal access to educational opportunities.

Cultural capital. Families that occupy different places in society deploy different resources in school. The school rewards the language and socialization practices of upper- and middle-income families while systematically devaluing those of low-income families.

Classroom discourse. Students who enter school from linguistic and ethnic minority families often have had no experience at home with the special features of classroom discourse. This presents them with a special challenge; their academic success depends on their acquiring this special code.

School sorting practices. Students from low-income and linguistic minority backgrounds are often placed in low-ability groups and slow (general or vocational education) academic tracks, where they do not receive the same quantity or quality of instruction as students in high-ability groups or college bound tracks.

Educators and researchers are calling for change. Any attempts at curricular innovation, however, must take into account the "culture of the school." The history of educational reform shows that attempts to change schools from the top down have met with resistance from educational practitioners. To be successful, innovations must take the everyday working life of teachers into consideration. This means they must be initiated from within the school culture, and include social resources to mediate the relationship between old practices and new ideas.

Consider the following scenario which is likely to occur in a U.S. high school:

A high school teacher sends notices home to the parents of two of her biology students, notifying the parents that their children have been cutting classes.

Now consider these parental responses:

The parents of one student take him aside and lambaste him for cutting class. They ground him from weekend dates and prohibit him from using the family car.

The parents of the other student call the principal and make an appointment with their son's teacher. Upon their arrival, the parents examine the biology curriculum, and chide the teacher for using worksheets too frequently, hands-on experiments too infrequently. This parent-teacher interaction results in the parents helping the teacher acquire lab equipment for the students to use to conduct experiments in class.

What's going on here? This hypothetical example, a likely scenario according to Lareau's (1990) analysis of parents' interactions with schools, illustrates one of the foundations of the sociological theory supporting the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning: Students' success in school does not depend solely on what happens in the classroom. Circumstances and events *outside* the classroom, such as the responses of parents exemplified above, contribute in important ways to students' success or failure *inside* school. Other out-of-school influences on student success include state and federal policies, fiscal conditions, and labor-management relations. This paper will examine the influence of some linguistic and cultural issues on students' success in school.

CULTURAL CAPITAL AND THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The issue of differences in parents' responses to schools is brought more into focus when I add that the student in the first example is from a low-income family, whereas the student in the second example is from a middle-income family. That is, parents' responses to schools break out along social class lines (Lareau, 1990). In order to understand the barriers to equality that have been erected, often quite unintentionally, in front of low-income cultural and linguistic minority youth, we need to understand the ways in which social class and ethnicity interact with language and culture.

Bourdieu's (1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) ideas about "cultural capital" are helpful in this regard. He proposes that each status group in society has developed distinctive, if often implicit, cultural practices. These are their ways of acting, ways of talking, ways of deploying the cultural and economic resources available to them. Bourdieu suggests that children and families from different levels of the social status hierarchy have access to different resources for dealing with school. In my hypothetical example, the parents deployed different resources to deal with their children's trouble in biology class. The low-income parents, with limited time and disposable income to intervene in their child's schooling, blamed the child and left his education to the school. The middle-income parents, with occupational skills and occupational prestige that probably matched or surpassed those of the teacher, had resources to become involved in the education of their child. Such resources might range from managing child care to hiring tutors to taking time off work for a parent-teacher conference.

Thus, social class positions and the cultural capital associated with them contribute to the success of students in school. Although both lower-class and middle-class parents want their children to succeed in school, their social positions lead them to deploy different strategies to achieve that goal. The strategy deployed by lower-class parents—depending upon teachers to educate their children—may not promote success. The strategy deployed by middle-income parents—actively participating in the education of their children—seems to breed success. These parental practices, interactional mani-

festations of cultural capital, appear to give students from middle-income families advantages over their lower-class contemporaries, because, according to Bourdieu, schools reinforce and reward the practices of the elite (middle- and upper-income) classes and systematically devalue those of the lower classes, thereby contributing to the reproduction of inequality. But how do schools do this? Through what *processes* do schools contribute to the reproduction of inequality? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine more carefully the educational practices of schools. Doing so leads us to consider the second sociological foundation supporting the study of cultural diversity, that of the relationship between the culture of the school and the problem of inequality, e.g., unequal access to education and the unequal treatment of students from different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

When we think of school, we tend to think of its academic dimensions. In elementary school, the focus is on the acquisition of basic skills: literacy and numeracy. Students learn to read, write, and compute. In secondary school, the focus is on specific academic content, such as concepts and applications of social studies, science, and geography.

But under these academic concerns lies a social foundation. In addition to learning to read, write, compute, and master natural science and social science facts, students have to learn that there are interactionally appropriate ways in which to cast their academic knowledge and that certain ways of talking and acting are appropriate on some occasions and not others. I will refer to these tacit features of school as the "culture of the classroom."

A central feature of the culture of the classroom is the "recitation script" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), which dominates classroom instruction in North American schools. When the recitation script is enacted, the teacher assigns a text, in either oral or written form. The student's task is to absorb the text and recite it. After the student's recitation, the teacher assesses the student's performance.

If we look closely, we can uncover the features of the recitation script in typical elementary school lessons:

8:5 (I) **Teacher**: Where were you born, Prenda?
(R) **Pupil**: San Diego.
(E) **Teacher**: You were born in San Diego, all right.

8:6 (I) **Teacher**: Um, can you come up and find San Diego on the map?
(R) **Pupil**: (Goes to board and points.)
(E) **Teacher**: Right there, ok.

(I) Initiation; (R) Reply; (E) Evaluation

Although this segment is brief, it contains the main ingredients of classroom lessons that enact the recitation script (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1986, 1988). First is the sequential structure of the interaction. While everyday conversations seem to be organized in two-part sequences (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), classroom lessons are organized into three-part sequences. A teacher's initiation act induces a student's reply, which in turn invokes a teacher's evaluation. This three-part structure seems to result from the kinds of questions teachers ask. Teachers' questions often test students on what they have been taught rather than ask them to share what they know. These "known-information questions" (i.e., questions to which the teacher already knows the answer) are responsible for the presence of the evaluation act in the syntax of classroom lessons. Also note that the teacher's initiation act not only specifies an action to be taken (answering the question), it also identifies the person who is to take the action. That is, the normative order of the classroom includes a set of procedures for allocating turns and gaining access to the floor. Some of these procedures (as in the example above) identify the individual who will speak. Others (e.g., "Raise your hand if you know the answer") enable students to select

themselves as the next speaker; still others (e.g., "What's the answer to this one?") call for a group response. Thus, while access to the floor is governed by rules, the same rules do not apply at all times. There are occasions when students may reply directly and others when they must first receive permission. This means that students must determine which rules apply in a given situation—a difficult task, because the rules are seldom stated explicitly. Because the rules governing turn taking are often tacit, students must infer from the ongoing flow of discourse the appropriate way to engage in classroom interaction.

Learning to distinguish the special features of classroom lessons is an important aspect of the socialization of students into the often obscure culture of elementary school classrooms. Students need to learn that teachers will ask them questions to which the teachers already know the answer. They need to learn that teachers control the floor, which means that students cannot offer their opinions or introduce new topics whenever they want. Furthermore, teachers not only parcel out the floor; they take it back after a student replies.

When students enter secondary school, they find that the recitation script operates more on written than on oral texts. At this level, the initiation-reply-evaluation sequence that occurs in three successive turns in elementary school lessons may be spread across weeks of laboratory or homework assignments. Furthermore, additional features, albeit still implicit ones, are added to academic discourse. Now students are expected to develop a critical stance to texts, not just give personal opinions of them. It is not enough to give a personal reaction to a play, or to summarize the events in a news story. Students must be able to frame an argument, adopt someone else's point of view, dissect an argument made by someone else, and synthesize different points of view.

High school students are also expected to learn specialized registers—vocabulary items and rules for their use—in science (Lemke, 1990; Spanos & Crandall, 1990) and math (Pimm, 1987; Linn & Gelman, 1987). Such learning does not occur overnight; it takes a concerted effort on the part of the instructor and the learner. One aspect of learning the language of math and science is mastering new vocabulary items. Because terms like hypotenuse, equilateral triangle, cosine, dendrite, nucleus, electron, neutron, and quark are not encountered in everyday life, students must learn a whole new range of terms with specialized and technical meanings (Crandall, Dale, Rhodes, & Spanos, 1985).

Another difficulty arises when familiar terms take on unfamiliar meanings. Because the languages of math and science do not map directly onto natural language, incorrect interpretations and misunderstandings may occur:

> Although "multiply" always means to increase in everyday language, it need not in math or science. For example, when a number is multiplied by a fraction, there is a decrease ($4x^1/_2=2$). Similarly, addition may not indicate an increase qualitatively as the same as the sum of its parts, as in combining chemical elements ($H+0_2=H_20$). To understand this, one has to interpret the terms within the arena of mathematics or chemistry. (Gelman & Meck, 1991, p. 2-3)

A number of commentators (e.g., Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Gumperz, 1982; Heath, 1982; Philips,1982) suggest that the discourse features of the language spoken in the home of low-income and linguistic minority youth do not match the discourse features of the language used in school. Parents from middle-income families engage their children in "mini-lessons" at home, in which they ask known-information questions, seek information out of context, and push for abstract connections and analysis. This parallels the classroom discourse that children encounter in school. By contrast, parents from low-income and linguistic minority families ask their children questions that elicit real information, and that lead children to draw analogies and to synthesize information (Cazden, 1986, 1988; Heath, 1983). These differences present low-income and linguistic minority students with a special challenge when they

enter school and confront the very different—and implicit—rules of classroom discourse.

Now, if we frame these sociolinguistic observations in Bourdieu's terms, we would say that the cultural capital of different status groups is reinforced differentially by the schools. Familiarity with the tacit dimensions of schooling is passed on implicitly in middle- and upper-income families, and the ways of talking and acting associated with these groups appear in lessons, texts, and tests more often than the cultural knowledge associated with less elite groups. For example, college entrance exams call upon test takers to analyze architecture, painting, and sculpture, not popular movies, sports, and television plots.

The discourse of the classroom, then, is composed of known-information questions, uses ideas out of context, and celebrates the grouping of ideas into abstract taxonomies and schemas (Cazden, 1986, 1988; Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979; Mercer & Edwards, 1989). Students from low-income and linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds need to acquire this code; their academic success is linked to it, because teachers judge students on their acquisition of the discourse and culture of the school.[1]

SCHOOL SORTING PRACTICES AND UNEQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

At a number of crucial points, decisions are made about students that affect their educational opportunities in school and their career opportunities once they leave school. We will consider two important sorting decisions here: One occurs within a classroom when a teacher places students into ability groups; the second operates between classrooms, when students are segregated into different academic programs, tracks, or streams.[2] An examination of these practices reveals that students are sorted and stratified in such a way that the educational opportunities made available to them are not equal for all groups.

Ability Grouping. Ability grouping is the educational practice of dividing students into small working groups with students of equivalent ability in the same group. The rationale for ability grouping is this: Students of high ability are grouped together so that they can develop their skills, and students of low ability are grouped together so that the school can compensate for their lack of skills. An unanticipated consequence of ability grouping is that students are given differential access to educational curricula, and hence, to educational opportunity. Indeed, recent research (summarized by Cole & Griffin, 1987, p.24-42; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, in press) suggests that students placed into low-ability groups suffer from a consistent pattern of deprivation of access to educational opportunity.

The distribution of students to high-, middle-, and low-ability groups seems to be related to their parents' income and occupation. Children from one-parent households or from families with an unemployed worker are likely to be assigned to low-ability groups, whereas students from intact families or from families where the father or both parents are employed are assigned to middle and high groups (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Cicourel & Mehan, 1983).

Once placed into ability groups, students receive different treatment. Students in low-ability groups receive less instruction and less homework than students in high-ability groups. They receive a different kind of instruction as well; curricular material is broken down into small packets of information, apparently on the assumption that remedial students cannot handle complex or demanding work. Students assigned to low-ability groups are asked to remember and recite information learned in the past, whereas students in high-ability groups are encouraged to develop comprehension, interpretation, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, teachers exert control differently over students in high- and low-ability groups. In low-ability groups, teachers demand conformity to external rules; in high-ability groups, teachers exert control through reference to intrinsic rewards and internal motivations (Wilcox, 1982). In low-ability classes, teachers are more concerned with getting students to be punctual, sit quietly, and

follow instructions, and less concerned with educational achievement, motivation, and learning. In addition, students placed in low groups get different kinds of help from their teachers than students placed in high groups. The former receive corrections on technical matters, such as pronunciation and spelling (Diaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1988; Gumperz and Herasimchuk, 1975; McDermott & Aron, 1978). The latter receive hints that facilitate bridging from known to unknown information and that aid comprehension (Eder, 1981). Low-group students do less silent reading than high-group students, and when reading aloud are interrupted more often by the teacher and by fellow students (Allington, 1983; McDermott & Aron, 1978).

In sum, whereas the conventional wisdom about ability grouping suggests that the special instruction provided to students in low-ability groups will enable them to catch up with students in higher groups at some later date, the current research suggests that students perform poorly in school *because they are placed into low-ability groups*. That is, ability grouping results in a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Cooper & Good, 1982; Merton, 1957; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968): Students are placed in low groups because they are perceived as having low ability; once placed, they receive less concentrated, lower quality instruction than children in other groups; and at the end of the year, they perform considerably less well than children in other groups, thereby confirming the teacher's initial prediction.

Tracking. Students' differential access to educational opportunities is reinforced and reified by the tracking system, a stratification system that places high school students into different curriculum tracks, such as college prep, general education, or vocational education. General education requirements are a routine, explicit feature of high school. All students are required to take a specified number of courses in English, social studies, math, and science. Another routine, albeit implicit, feature of high school is that these courses are differentiated according to difficulty (advanced placement English vs. business English, or general math vs. algebra, for example) and grouped into clusters. National survey data indicate that 60-70% of tenth graders enrolled in honors math were also enrolled in honors English; a similar degree of overlap was evident for students in remedial math and remedial English (Gamoran, 1986). In short, the academic content of courses in different tracks is different. Students assigned to college bound tracks are exposed to more demanding academic curricula than students assigned to general or vocational education tracks (Oakes, 1985; Oakes et al., in press).

A further outcome of tracking is that the resulting classes are not equally desirable to teachers. Teachers with seniority in a district often get first choice of teaching assignments, and they often choose those with the most advantaged and motivated students. As a result, less experienced teachers are often placed in the most demanding situations—teaching students from low-income and linguistic minority backgrounds who are most in need of the high quality instruction that might better be provided by experienced teachers (Finley, 1984; Gamoran & Berands, 1987; Haycock & Navarro, 1989; Oakes et al., in press; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979).

Placement in different tracks also has practical consequences for students, because placement influences access to college and jobs. Colleges and universities accept only certain courses for admission (laboratory science courses but not survey science courses; algebra, trigonometry, and calculus but not business math, consumer math, or general math, for example).

So the issue becomes the following: How do students get into college prep rather than general or vocational tracks? Coleman et al. (1966) and Lee & Bryk (1988) reported survey data according to which students said they chose their own tracks and were happy with their track placement. But study after study of *actual tracking practices* as opposed to studies of *opinions about tracking* has shown that track placement is based on students' socioeconomic background and past performance, and not on students' choice.

Track placement, like ability grouping, seems to be related to family income and occupation. Children from middle- or upper-income families are more likely to be assigned to college bound tracks and students from low-income families or linguistic minority backgrounds are more likely to be assigned to general or vocational tracks (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963; Cicourel & Mehan, 1983; Oakes et al., in press). Blacks and Hispanics are often assigned to vocational programs that train them for low-level occupations and are seldom admitted to programs for gifted and talented students (Darling-Hammond, 1985).

If students do not choose their tracks, how are tracking decisions made? Presaging Lareau's findings reported above, Cicourel & Kitsuse (1963) suggested that parental intervention influenced track placement. In their study, students from middle-income families with low grades and test scores were tracked higher than students from low-income families with similarly low grades and test scores. Even more telling, children from low-income families with adequate test scores and low grades were placed in a low track, while children with similar test scores and grades from middle-income families were placed in a middle-level track.

Erickson & Shultz (1982) highlight the role of the school counselor in placement decisions. They found that counselors routinely inquired into course grades and degree requirements during counseling sessions, but that personal information about students sometimes emerged as well. Academic information interacted with the more personal information to produce differences in counseling treatments, which ultimately resulted in different career paths being taken by the students. Counseling proceeded differently when counselors and students discovered similarities in backgrounds and experiences than it did when they discussed only academic information. Those students who established a special relationship with a counselor based on shared personal knowledge were more likely to receive positive counseling, rule bending, and extra help than those students who interacted with counselors on a universalistic basis.

In sum, ability grouping and tracking erect barriers to equal educational opportunity, especially for students from low-income and linguistic minority backgrounds. The quality of instruction for high-ability-group students is not made available to low-ability-group students, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for low-ability-group students to jump the barrier into academically demanding courses. Assignment to low groups, tracks, and special programs can lower students' aspirations and self-esteem as they internalize the labels attached to them by the school (Mercer, 1974). As a result, placement into tracks and ability groups takes on a caste-like character. Once students are placed into tracks and ability groups, they seldom leave them (Cicourel & Mehan, 1983; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1985).

THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL AND THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE

Tharp and Gallimore (1988), like a number of others (e.g., Brown & Palinscar, in press; Cazden, 1986, 1988; Edelsky, Draper, & Smith, 1983; Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991; Lemke, 1990; Mercer & Edwards, 1989), have been calling for change in the structures of classroom discourse. Cazden invites teachers and researchers to move beyond the "default" condition of classroom interaction. Tharp & Gallimore recommend that "responsive teaching"—in which teachers and students engage in authentic conversations without predetermined outcomes—replace the ubiquitous recitation script.

We must keep in mind that any attempt to modify classroom discourse occurs within the social context of the school, an observation that invites us to examine the history of previous attempts to change the school. Unfortunately, that history is a depressing one. Attempts at change, including school organization and curriculum reform, have met with considerable resistance (Sarason, 1982). Importantly for our consideration, a significant part of this resistance has come from the major participants in the

school, i.e., teachers, administrators, and parents.

The history of technological innovations in schools provides an instructive example. Attempts to introduce machine technologies (such as radio, film, instructional television, and computers) into classrooms have ridden the pendulum (Slavin, 1989) through a cycle of exhilaration—scientific credibility—disappointment—blame (Cuban, 1985). In each case, the cycle began with extravagant claims for the revolutionary power of the machine to transform teacher practice and student learning. Early studies reported that the new technology was as effective as a teacher using conventional practices. Teachers soon started to complain, however: about logistical difficulties in using machines, about problems in getting access to machines, and about the incompatibility of the new machines with existing programs. These scattered complaints marred the mantle of scientific credibility that had begun to settle over the innovation. Later, large scale surveys conducted by university researchers documented infrequent teacher use of the machines. These results were then used by supporters of technological innovation to criticize both teachers and administrators, who were blamed for blocking the advance of technology and classroom improvement.

Why have attempts to revolutionize education through the introduction of technology stalled? The answers most often given are the absence of hardware and the low quality of software (Wood, 1988: 2; U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment, 1988). While these technical considerations are certainly important, we need to look to social organizational issues (Cuban, 1985; Sarason, 1982)—"the culture of the school"—to understand why computers, like other curricular innovations, have not been adopted more widely by schools. Such innovations have not been adopted for the most mundane of reasons: practical organizational circumstances. Practical circumstances include traditions of teaching, local procedures for scheduling courses, and previously established practices of organizing curriculum and instruction and dispensing funds and resources.[3]

Proposals to introduce the new math, bilingual education, and education for handicapped students, among other innovations, were initiated by federal law. Others (such as open classrooms) were implemented on the recommendation of Presidential commissions or panels funded by business. In all cases, the proposals were made by people outside the local school. The clamor for change raised by these external reformers was not always matched by the people working within the culture of the school.

Such top-down reforms have seldom taken into account the impact that their recommendations will have on the everyday working lives of the people who must implement the policies. Federal mandates and commission recommendations often run up against the practical circumstances that comprise the working life of educators in local schools. Teachers in local schools are "street level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1983); that is, like social workers or police on patrol, teachers must implement mandates from above in complex local circumstances. But the practical conditions of their everyday working lives are such that they cannot always implement the externally imposed policies exactly as articulated. So they improvise. They modify their standard operating procedures and daily teaching practices to adhere to the new policies to the degree possible within the constraints of local circumstances. Because local situations vary widely, federal policies and commission recommendations are necessarily modified in a variety of ways, precluding consistent and widespread adoption of mandated innovations as they were originally intended.

Study after study reports that reforms that add work to an already crowded teaching schedule, and that are not perceived by teachers as helping them to meet their previously established teaching goals, will be rejected by those teachers. This observation underlines the importance of teachers' knowledge and the way teachers organize their teaching day when considering educational change.

We can point to some successful curricular innovations. Those that have been successful have taken the everyday working life of teachers into consideration. This seems to be true independent of

the theoretical orientation of the innovation. The Science Curriculum Improvement Study (SCIS) (Karplus, 1965), an elementary school science curriculum built explicitly on a Piagetian foundation of exploration and discovery, and DISTAR (Becker, 1978), an elementary school reading program employing behavioristic principles of stimulus-response-reinforcement, were both highly successful innovations. Given the tremendous difference in their theoretical orientations, theory alone cannot explain their success. What seemed to make the difference between these two programs and unsuccessful attempts at innovation was the system of social supports that surrounded SCIS and DISTAR. Both programs featured extensive teacher training to accompany the curricular package. Program representatives worked side by side with classroom teachers to show how the recommendations could be integrated into existing classroom practice.

So, as we consider the possibility of modifying educational practice, including classroom discourse, we need to keep the culture of the school firmly in mind. Top-down proposals, imposed on the school from outside, are not likely to be successful. Proposals that are initiated from within the culture of the school and that take into account the working life of teachers have a greater chance of success. And innovations, whether in curriculum or classroom discourse, cannot be treated as stand-alone packages of information. They require social resources to mediate the relationship between new ideas and old practices.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to illustrate the sociological foundations supporting the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning. Its basic theme is that in order to understand the barriers to equality faced by low-income cultural and linguistic minority youth, we need to understand the ways in which social class and ethnicity interact with language and culture.

(1) The cultural capital of different status groups is related differently to the culture of the school. The language and socialization practices employed at home by middle- and upper-class families are reinforced by the discourse and social organization of classrooms, whereas the language and socialization practices of low-income and linguistic minority families do not match those found in the classroom.

(2) Classroom discourse is a crucial component of the culture of the school. Students who enter school from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds are presented with a special challenge. They may not have had experience at home with the special features of classroom discourse. They need to acquire and use this special code; their academic success depends on it.

(3) The sorting practices of the school, primarily ability grouping and tracking, erect barriers to equal educational opportunity, especially for students from low-income and linguistic minority backgrounds. Students in low-ability groups or general educational tracks do not receive the same quantity or quality of instruction as students in high-ability groups or college bound tracks. Furthermore, assignment to low groups, tracks, and special programs can lower students' aspirations and self-esteem. Once students are placed into slow tracks and low-ability groups, they seldom leave them.

(4) The culture of the school must be taken into account when considering social change. The history of educational innovation shows that attempts to change schools from the top down have met with resistance from educational practitioners. Unsuccessful educational innovations have not taken the social organization of schooling into account. To be successful, curricular innovations must take the everyday working life of teachers into consideration. This means they must start from within the culture of the school, rather than be imposed from the outside, and include social resources to mediate the relationship between new ideas and old practices.

NOTES

[1] A caveat is in order at this point because "parent education" is such a hot topic in educational circles these days. In pointing out the differences between socialization at home and education in school for linguistic minority youth, I am not recommending (as many educators have done recently) that parents abandon their cultural practices and adopt those of the dominant (and successful) groups. Certainly parents from low income and linguistic minority backgrounds can benefit from more information of a political sort, e.g., advice about their rights, how to approach school officials and receive an appropriate education for their children. But I am not convinced that they need to eliminate their cultural patterns of child rearing or adopt those of the dominant social group.

[2] Yet another critical point of decision making about children, of course, occurs in educational testing situations. Space does not permit an examination of the consequences of current testing practices here.

[3] Darling-Hammond's (1985) tongue-in-cheek want ad depicts the practical circumstances facing classroom teachers well:

> Wanted: College graduates with an academic major (master's degree preferred). Excellent communication and leadership skills required. Challenging opportunity to serve 150 clients daily, developing up to five different products each day to meet their needs. This diversified job allows employee to exercise typing, clerical, law enforcement and social work skills between assignments and after hours. Adaptability helpful, since suppliers cannot always deliver goods and support services on time. Typical workweek 47 hours. Special nature of work precludes fringe benefits such as lunch and coffee breaks, but work has many intrinsic rewards. (p. 1)

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